

PREFACE



I'd like to present Jesse, everyone's language learning disabled youngster. You've met him, I know. He has been in "speech" since starting school in kindergarten. He's what we call in the schools a "lifer." At first he was served for "multiple articulation" problems. He was diagnosed as language disordered after he was retained in kindergarten. In third grade he was also enrolled in a learning disabilities (LD) program, and retained again that year. He's 13 now, still in a learning disabilities program, still going to "speech." (Do you wonder exactly what he's doing in speech? So do I.) He is having a terrible time in middle school, not doing well in his LD classes, and doing very poorly in regular education classes. No one expects that he will make it in school much beyond his 16th birthday.

The pertinent questions we must ask about Jesse are: What can we do for him now? What could we have done differently in the past? More general questions are: What can the schools do for similar students with underlying language disorders for whom academic success is difficult? How do we as speech-language pathologists (SLPs) facilitate academic success with language intervention?

This issue is concerned with Jesse and others like him. It addresses the above questions and offers to practitioners working with school-age youngsters a tool for redefining language therapy with this population. While we recognize that children and youths with language learning disabilities are found in many settings, we wish to acknowledge that practitioners in schools do the lion's share of this work. We suggest to our colleagues in the schools that the public school setting provides a unique opportunity to implement intervention with a captive audience. As these articles unfold it should be clear that we believe you to be in the proverbial cat bird's seat when it comes to facilitating academic success with language intervention.

In assembling this issue, we invited the contributions of professionals who are kindred spirits. There is no disagreement here among contributors. Our intent is not to debate the issues but to offer principles from different perspectives focused on one target: making a difference in school suc-

cess for children who have language learning disabilities. Although many of the concepts presented here are not new, common practice lags behind the state of the art, and language intervention often does not facilitate academic success in a substantive way for many of our students. Therefore our aim extends beyond the presentation of information. We seek to persuade you to consider changes in the provision of language services and we offer practical means to accomplish this end.

There are themes which recur in the articles: (1) Language disorders are dynamic phenomena, changing across the life span and including critical transition periods. (2) Although early intervention is important, preschool programs won't solve the language learning disabilities problem. (3) Language intervention must be relevant and that relevance can be appropriately defined, at least in part, in the context of school work. (4) Dual consideration of the learner and the environment in which s/he functions forms the basis of intervention goal setting. (5) Language intervention should not be a fragmented service but a component of the curriculum for students with language learning disabilities which represents a partnership among professionals.

In the lead article Tony Bashir sets the stage by offering an historical look at the progression of language needs of disordered children across grade levels, highlighting critical transition points and drawing implications for intervention. He presents the notion which recurs throughout this volume—the role of the SLP in academic learning is a crucial one, but it is a role that is not in the “Lone Ranger” style. To have an effect on school success we must conceptualize a role that integrally relates to other professionals who deal with academics.

Because serving adolescents poses special problems for speech-language pathologists, in the second article Keith Lenz and I focus on special considerations in working with this population. Our track record with this age group is not a strong one, and only recently in the field have

we addressed the possibility that traditional delivery models may not be effective. We present some basic information to the practicing clinician about adolescents and secondary education. We speak to the relationship between language and learning strategies and suggest directions for delivery of services that will make a difference in the school life of adolescents.

Next, Gerry Wallach eliminates what is often perceived by practitioners as a dichotomy between research and practice by offering research as a “map” for language intervention. In arguing for theory-driven intervention she bridges this gap and in practical terms gives us the domains in which we should be directing our intervention efforts. She focuses on the notion of communication proficiency, and contrasts oral/literate styles, home/school language, and narrative/expository text.

Diana Hughes's piece provides a key element to all intervention efforts—how to make a real difference in the life of the child by planning for generalization of behavior change to other situations and settings. This article should promote the notion that generalization, rather than being conceptualized as a last step in the treatment process, should be handled from the start. Her five key strategies will be especially helpful to practitioners. Hopefully one effect of Diana's offering will be that school clinicians see the value of group work in presenting a context for generalization work.

Following the concepts in the generalization article, Danielle Ripich explores the context of classroom discourse requirements as a basis for selecting appropriate therapy targets. This direction opens a whole new world in language intervention in which classroom discourse is viewed in relation to academic achievement. She presents a strong case for SLPs to come out of the therapy room. She advocates multiple perspectives in assessment and intervention, in keeping with the notion of collaboration.

In the next contribution, Shelly Chabon and Patty Prelock's understanding of the “zebra question” puts in perspective

the notion of the reciprocity of language and curriculum; they reiterate the need for integrating the two. They hold that language training must be academically relevant and that curriculum must be linguistically anchored. They focus on metacognitive and metalinguistic abilities and promote the use of a “strategies” approach in which students are taught how to learn more effectively.

Lastly, Barbara Hodson, Carole Nonomura, and Mary Jane Zappia take a giant step into the issue of phonological disorders and their effect on academics. This was a difficult piece since the research is not yet clear on the relationship between the two. However, inclusion of this contribution is an attempt to break from the traditional view of phonological problems as “just speech disorders” and look at the academic progress of unintelligible children, speculating about their academic performance from a phonological standpoint. We are introduced to “Lisa,” who assists in this exploration.

We hope that reading this issue will be a step forward in providing academically relevant language services to school-age youngsters who have language learning disabilities, and that you will take opportunities to discuss its content with colleagues in the schools. We encourage you to think of language in relation to the changing curriculum throughout the grades; to consider the special problems of providing services to adolescents; to seek theory-driven intervention; to focus on generalization approaches; to view classroom discourse as an important component; to use a “strategies” approach; to attend to the academic learning of children with phonological disorders in relation to academic progress; and, above all, *to be a collaborator*. We challenge you to facilitate academic success as a major goal in providing language intervention to children and youth with language learning disabilities.

Barbara J. Ehren, Ed.D.
Guest Editor